

Department of Human Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, May 31, 2007

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-9
Health Care	10-16
Unemployment	17-18
*State Budget	19-24
DHS Employees	25

*Important story at this spot

[Return to regular web page](#)



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

May 31, 2007

Mount Clemens couple pleads no contest to hiding drugs in kids' diapers

Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- A Clinton Township couple charged with hiding the illegal drug Ecstasy in candy wrappers and cocaine in their children's diapers pleaded no contest Wednesday in Macomb Circuit Court.

Marvin Blocker and Tanya Humphreys were charged with six drug counts and one count of second-degree child abuse for keeping the drugs near their five children with whom they shared a house, police said. Blocker is also charged with resisting a police officer.

"I don't consider them users. I consider them providers who were going to put the drugs in the community," said William Dailey, chief of the drug unit for the Macomb County Prosecutors Office. "What is horrific about this case is that cocaine and other drugs were within arms' reach of kids."

The 24-year-old couple, who are free on bond, will be sentenced June 27 by Macomb Circuit Court Judge Edward Servitto.

Blocker and Humphreys were arrested Jan. 31 after a raid on their Clinton Township trailer by officers from the County of Macomb Enforcement Team and Clinton Township. When inside, they found crack cocaine, marijuana, Ecstasy and prescription drugs in the trailer, all within reach of the five children, who are 5 and younger.

A police report read in court by Servitto on Wednesday stated that officers found deplorable conditions at the home, such as dog feces on the ground, cigarette ashes on the floor, a torn mattress and holes in the walls. Baby food jars were also found that were used to cook crack cocaine and a Sweet Tart candy bag filled with 50 Ecstasy pills.

The children are now living with Blocker's parents.

"They want to put this all behind them," said Robert Vitale, the attorney for Blocker. "They will do what they have to do put this behind them and reunite with their family."

You can reach Edward L. Cardenas at (586) 468-0529 or ecardenas@detnews.com.

[Return to regular web page](#)



Drugs within reach of children; pair may lose parental rights.

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A man and woman accused of selling drugs in candy wrappers out of a Clinton Township mobile home pleaded no contest to all of the charges against them.

Marvin J. Blocker and Tanya R. Humphreys, both 24, are scheduled to be sentenced June 27 in Macomb County Circuit Court after making the pleas Wednesday to six drug charges for selling crack cocaine,

Ecstasy pills, marijuana and prescription drugs out of their home. They also pleaded to second-degree child abuse for keeping drugs within reach of five children aged 5 or younger.

Blocker, who also was charged with resisting arrest, faces a minimum term of three to five years, and Humphreys a minimum term of 24 to 40 months, based on sentencing guidelines agreed upon by the prosecution and defense.

They currently are free after posting bonds, which in March were lowered by Chief Judge Antonio Viviano from \$300,000 to \$50,000 cash or surety for Blocker, and \$100,000 to \$30,000 cash or surety for Humphreys, a move criticized at the time by Macomb Prosecutor Eric Smith.

Humphreys' defense attorney, David Morreale, said part of the reason for the no contest plea is that the state Department of Human Services is seeking to terminate the defendants' parental rights. Blocker is believed to be the father of the five children and Humphreys the mother of two of them.

Morreale said his client plans to fight for parental rights, and a no contest plea provides some legal protection in civil proceedings. It is treated as a guilty plea in criminal court.

Assistant Macomb prosecutor William Dailey said the horrendous nature of the case motivated him to not offer a plea deal and take the case to trial, but the two defendants pleaded "on the nose" to all of the charges, which is their right.

"I'm pleased they will be going to prison, or we expect they will be going to prison," Dailey said after the hearing. "This is a case I wouldn't have minded putting in front of a jury. The jury would have been appalled."

Dailey, who heads the prosecutor's office drug unit, added: "How did they put these drugs within arm's reach of children? You don't run across a case very often where drugs are within reach of children."

Police from the County of Macomb Enforcement Team and Clinton Township raided the trailer northeast of Gratiot Avenue and Joy Boulevard on Jan. 31 and found not only the drugs, but the condition of the home virtually unlivable. COMET and Clinton cops described a "vile" odor, and found feces from three pit bulls and week-old food. Mattresses were soiled and didn't have bedding.

Among drugs found were an undisclosed number of crack rocks wrapped in a baby diaper, 50

Ecstasy pills in "Smarties" candy wrappers, cocaine residue in a baby jar, one pound of marijuana and prescription drugs, such as 120 Vicodin pills and OxyContin pills, police said. Pills were kept on at least one 18-foot container within reach of the children, who were removed by officials. Police found weight scales, a ledger that appeared to record drug transactions, a police scanner and \$334 in cash. No weapons were found.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/053107/loc_plea002.shtml

Midland Daily News

May 30, 2007

- Midland Police contacted the Department of Human Services after being called to a domestic assault involving a 1-year-old girl at a Wisconsin Street home on Thursday.

They arrested the child's father, age 23, after speaking to the mother, age 20, and being told he had forcefully laid the child down and placed a hand over her mouth to stop her crying.

Officers also noted the living conditions in the home, which included a utility knife, screwdriver digging tool within the baby's reach, as well as old food and other debris scattered on countertops, furniture and the floor. They noted it was impossible to walk on the carpet without stepping on items.

05/31/2007

Mother has questions after son is left on bus

3-year-old falls asleep, ends up at bus garage

BY CHRISTINE FINGER

cfinger@record-eagle.com

TRAVERSE CITY — The mother of a Traverse City Area Public Schools student wants to know why her son's school bus trip ended at the garage instead of the classroom.

Nicole Anderson-Wilder said she took her 3-year-old son Emery, who attends a TCAPS early childhood program, to the bus stop at about 8:40 a.m. on Tuesday and watched him board. But his school called her just after 10:30 a.m. to report that he hadn't arrived.

"Of course, I'm panicking," she said.

Anderson-Wilder called the district's transportation department and found out her son was at the TCAPS bus garage.

"Turns out he had fallen asleep on the bus and he hadn't gotten off," she said.

The incident left Anderson-Wilder with plenty of questions, including how it was possible that no one noticed her son didn't exit with his fellow students. She wants the bus driver to face discipline for failing to check for her son. She also suggested the district reevaluate its procedures to ensure the incident isn't repeated.

Christine Davis, TCAPS executive director of human resources, said the district is examining events that led to the boy being left on the bus. She said she was alerted Tuesday morning by the transportation department about what occurred.

"We are looking into it as we speak. We look at how did it happen and how could we prevent it in the future," she said. "They brought him in safely and his mother came to pick him up."

Davis said bus driver procedures call for checking to make sure all passengers are off the bus when it returns to the garage. The driver involved has no history of disciplinary problems, she said.

Anderson-Wilder said she will provide her own transportation to school from now on.



Record-Eagle/Douglas Tesner

Nicole Anderson-Wilder holds her son Emery, 3, at their home in Blair Township. While riding a bus on his way to a Traverse City Area Public Schools early childhood program, Emery fell asleep and did not get off at the school.

"I just think other parents should know what is going on," she said. "He's not going to be riding the bus anymore."

Copyright 1998-2007 Traverse City Record-Eagle

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **hometownlife.com**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published May 30, 2007

Man, 22, charged in sex case with girl, 14

Alex Lundberg

A 22-year-old Livonia man is in jail after being charged with criminal sexual conduct in connection with a months-long relationship with a 14-year-old Livingston County girl.

Aaron Christopher Wilkerson was arraigned on six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and three counts of child sexually abusive activity May 28 in front of Judge Jeffrey Fanto in 34th District Court. He was given a \$500,000 cash or surety bond and is being held in Wayne County Jail pending a June 5 preliminary exam.

If convicted, Wilkerson faces life sentences for each of the first-degree charges and 20 years for each of the child sexual abuse charges.

Livonia police Lt. Gregory Winn said the investigation started when the victim's mother reported her missing Thursday, May 24. "She contacted a Detroit police officer when her daughter didn't come home from school," he said. "He contacted the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and they passed it along to us."

On Friday, May 25, Livonia police officers arrested Wilkerson as he left his home with the 14-year-old girl. Investigation into the incident lead police to believe the two had been having sex since April after meeting Myspace. At the time of the first meeting, the victim was 13 years old.

According to an ICAC press release, the charges of child sexually abusive activity stem from the uploading of sexually explicit photos and a video.

The Michigan ICAC Task Force includes officers from state, county and local law enforcement operations as well as the U.S. Secret Service.

alundberg@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2109

[Return to regular web page](#)

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

May 31, 2007

Opinion

Stop child abuse with felony murder rule

Nedda Shayota

Michigan needs a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse. And that means adopting a felony murder rule for child abuse that leads to death.

That's the minimum our state can do to create an agenda that will reduce the epidemic of child abuse.

Child welfare laws seem to be written more to protect adults than children. The practice now is to maintain families and keep children with their parents.

But when those parents abuse and kill, the most humane thing a society can do is separate the child from the family.

Abusive parents don't deserve to keep their children.

To create a system that places the child's welfare at the center of the discussion, Michigan must adopt a zero-tolerance policy for harm of children.

The first step is creating a first-degree child abuse felony law that works. Such a law has been pending in the Legislature but hasn't come to a vote.

Current law paralyzes prosecutors and serves as a loophole for abusive parents, protecting them from the serious punishment their crimes deserve.

While prosecutors may prove that the parent intended to commit the abusive acts that resulted in the death of a child, they can almost never overcome the presumption that a parent would want to deliberately kill a child.

That makes a first-degree murder conviction virtually impossible.

The law should be changed to state that when a parent or guardian commits abuse severe enough to kill the child, the intent to abuse is assumed to be the intent to kill. And that should mandate a charge of pre-meditated murder.

This is not a major leap. The deliberateness of abuse that leads to the torturous death of a child through malnourishment or beatings should speak for itself.

Since 79 percent of the children killed under these circumstances are below the age of 4, one need only examine the size, intelligence and outward appearance of the child in comparison to the adult to evidence the deliberate desire to overpower the child until he or she dies.

To appease those who cling to the belief that child abuse deaths can be accidental acts, an exception based on autopsy evidence can be written into the law for those cases.

Sadly, the evidence most often reveals the dark truth that these children have suffered for prolonged periods of time with both older and new wounds as testament.

Social and health care workers, prosecutors and police officers have heartbreaking stories of children who are deliberately starved, weakened to the point of sickness, then beaten and tortured so as to endure slow, painful and agonizing deaths.

How can this be considered anything less than first-degree murder? It isn't until we hold absolute a child's right to his or her bodily integrity that our laws and actions can follow.

It is society's duty to be every child's voice, to advocate on behalf of those who can't protect themselves.

We must never forget that these are real children who feel real pain. Ricky Holland, Isaac Letheridge and all the other children in Michigan who have died at the hands of abusive adults should be all the motivation we need to change the law to punish child abuse related deaths as the serious, pre-meditated crimes they are.

Nedda Shayota is a Detroit attorney working with state lawmakers on legislation that would create a felony murder charge for child abuse-related deaths. Please e-mail comments to letters@detnews.com.

[Return to regular web page](#)



Thursday, May 31, 2007

Greenville finally getting low-income health clinic

Ryan Jeltema
Staff Writer

Thursday, May 31, 2007



The Maplewood Health Center in Greenville soon will become home to a federally qualified health care clinic.

GREENVILLE - People with little or no health insurance will have a new option for receiving health care in Greenville this fall.

Cherry Street Health Services in Grand Rapids announced Wednesday that it had been awarded funding to open and operate a federally qualified health care clinic in the Maplewood Health Center, 306 S. Maplewood St.

The clinic, which will be called the Montcalm Area Health Center, will offer a full range of medical, dental and social work services. The facility is expected to open in October with a full-time physician, dentist and dental hygienist, with more employees added as the patient load grows.

Cherry Street Executive Director Chris Shea said the clinic will accept all patients regardless of whether they have health insurance, charging only \$15 per visit for people living below the poverty line based on income and family size.

"We operate on the basis of providing care for the uninsured on a sliding fee," he said. "We discount pretty heavily and the federal government provides the difference. We won't turn anyone away if they have no ability to pay."

Shea said studies show Montcalm County has higher than average levels of infant mortality, low birthweight newborns, preventable hospitalizations, chronic illness, infectious diseases and unintentional injuries. Prenatal care also is not accessed as early in pregnancies as it should be locally.

Shea estimated the clinic will serve about 3,000 people during the first year with 8,000 medical office visits and 1,600 dental visits. Its budget will be about \$1.5 million.

He expects the patient count to hit 4,000 during the second year and continue climbing.

About 90 percent of the patients likely will be uninsured or paid for through Medicare and Medicaid.

"We're aiming for anyone who is uninsured or unemployed," Shea said. "In many cases people are used to insurance. When that disappears the consequences can be surprising."

He said people with health insurance still will be welcome. The clinic will be able to bill most insurers for office visits.

It will be structured similar to a doctor's office. Patients will be asked to call ahead for appointments. A 24-hour service will be available for people to call and find out whether they should seek immediate treatment in an emergency room or wait for an office appointment the next morning.

"We'll see patients by appointment and try to move urgent care cases ahead," Shea said. "This is very tightly structured with agreements with other health care facilities in the county."

Cherry Street's executive board will oversee the facility. Shea said most of the board members are from Cherry Street's 11 other locations around Grand Rapids. Greenville representatives will be added later this year.

Spectrum Health United Memorial Chief Executive Officer Paul Bonis has been vying for the clinic for about three years, spurred on by the nearly 4,000 manufacturing job losses in Montcalm County over the past few years.

A local group of health and social service agency representatives also looked at how to meet the needs of uninsured and low-income populations over the past few months.

Bonis credited the Michigan Primary Care Association, Gov. Jennifer Granholm, U.S. Sens. Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow, U.S. Reps. Dave Car

and Vernon Ehlers, and Michigan Department of Community Health Director Janet Olszewski for helping make the clinic a reality.

"This is a very exciting and positive step toward improving access to health care services for those most in need," Bonis said.3039.

Related Links

Content © 2007 Stafford Communications Group
Software © 1998-2007 1up! Software, All Rights Reserved



Stabenow urges support for more children's health care funding

5/30/2007, 6:25 p.m. ET

By **KEN THOMAS**
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., outlined support for a major expansion of a children's health care insurance program on Wednesday, saying it could reduce the number of people who lack coverage.

Democrats have proposed spending \$75 billion over five years to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP, which was designed to provide health coverage for children of the working poor.

"My goal is to have this be the first step in providing health care to every single citizen in Michigan and the country," Stabenow said in a conference call with reporters.

Michigan's program, called MICHild, covered more than 118,000 children in 2006 along with about 100,000 adults who received a limited package of benefits under the program. But state officials note that more than 170,000 children in Michigan do not have health insurance.

SCHIP's annual budget is \$5.5 billion but an upcoming renewal of the program could lead to a budget battle between Democrats controlling Congress and the White House. Democrats have proposed spending more than double the Bush administration's recommendation.

Jeff Nelligan, a spokesman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said the Bush administration "believes the focus of SCHIP should be on the coverage of low-income, uninsured kids and that the program should not be used as a pathway for universal, government-run health insurance."

Stabenow suggested additional savings could come through reforms to private insurance plans under Medicare and noted that Republican Sen. Gordon Smith of Oregon has called for an increase to the 39 cent-federal tobacco tax to help pay for an expansion of the program.

A report released Wednesday by Families USA, a health care advocacy group, suggested that if the program was funded at the levels sought by Democrats, it would provide Michigan with about \$1.32 billion over the next five years to expand coverage.

The SCHIP program was created a decade ago to provide health insurance for children of working parents who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to afford private coverage. It is funded through a combination of federal and state dollars.

Copyright 2007 Associated Press. All rights reserved.
This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

© 2007 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

[Return to regular web page](#)

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

May 31, 2007

More Michigan kids may get health care help

Congress plans to triple state's spending for program to \$1.3B to aid uninsured.

Gordon Trowbridge / Detroit News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Thousands of uninsured Michigan children could receive health coverage if Congress follows through in June on a plan to boost spending on a popular federal program, a liberal advocacy group said Wednesday.

Michigan would get triple the amount it now receives from the State Children's Health Insurance Program, according to the report from Families USA, a group that advocates universal health insurance. The program -- known as SCHIP -- helps pay for the state's MICHild program, which now covers about 34,000 children.

Last week, both houses of Congress passed a budget blueprint for next year that would add \$50 billion over five years to SCHIP. Families USA said Michigan's share would be about \$1.3 billion -- potentially enough to cover two-thirds of Michigan's 170,000 kids without health coverage, Sen. Debbie Stabenow told reporters on Wednesday.

But Congress must include the money in a renewal of SCHIP, which Congress is expected to take up in June.

Stabenow sits on the Senate Budget Committee, which wrote the budget outline, and on the Commerce Committee, which will now take up the detailed SCHIP legislation.

"This is not easy, to put together the \$50 billion we're talking about," Stabenow said. But, she said, "I feel like the political will is there."

Republicans in Congress have expressed skepticism about such a large increase in a federal health program. They point to Michigan and other states, which have taken surplus SCHIP money and used it to cover uninsured adults. Children from households with incomes of up to 200 percent of the poverty level are eligible for MICHild; since 2003, the state has used left-over SCHIP money to cover adults who make up to 35 percent of the poverty level.

T.J. Bucholz, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Community Health, said extra money could allow Michigan to raise the income limits for MICHild and uninsured children who aren't eligible now. "It would be awesome" if Congress included the additional money, he said.

The state would also have to find money in its strained budget to get more federal dollars.

[Return to regular web page](#)



Medicaid beds: Why guarantees needed

Thursday, May 31, 2007

We agree with the sentiment that prompted some local agencies to ask the state to set aside nursing-home beds for Medicaid patients. After the state closed Cedar Knoll Nursing Home, it apparently skipped town as the elderly patients were moved around like pawns on a chess board, many outside of the community. That is unacceptable.

Now a number of private companies are vying for the 150 nursing home beds available as a result of the closing. They must go through a certificate-of-need review to establish the need for new beds. However, there is no state mandate that those beds be for Medicaid patients. And therein lies the problem. Typically, facilities prefer private-pay patients, since Medicaid's reimbursement is lower.

In a meeting last week, representatives from 16 local groups asked for a halt to bidding on the 150 beds. They have asked state Sen. Mark Schauer, D-Battle Creek, to help stop the Department of Community Health from acting on the bids. Their intent is to buy time for a solution to the Medicaid bed problem. Time is needed because the group is proposing some innovative options, which may not be easily achieved. For example, one option is having the state allow Medicaid dollars to follow a patient rather than going directly to an institution.

The innovations may or may not be welcomed by state officials, who are more into survival than innovation these days.

Still, let's keep in mind that these changes are being sought for the benefit of some of Jackson County's most vulnerable citizens.

Sixty-three of the Cedar Knoll patients were placed out of Jackson County, which created an inconvenience for family members.

Moreover, since the original placement of those patients, at least seven had to be moved again -- this time after the state closed Litchfield Nursing Home in Hillsdale County.

We wondered if the Jackson County Medical Care Facility might help out. That facility, with 194 beds, has traditionally been the place of last resort for county residents. It is taxpayer subsidized. However, we learned that the facility already has a high percentage of Medicaid patients. Of this week's census of 189 patients, 142 are Medicaid -- about 75 percent. The facility did take 12 of the Cedar Knoll patients. It apparently did what it could.

Thus, the one place that welcomes Medicaid patients already has so many of them that it cannot accept others on demand. So where does that leave Jackson County and its sudden vacuum of 150 beds?

Clearly, this is a set of circumstances that the state cannot ignore. We remind state officials that, from a local perspective, they "created" this need by closing down Cedar Knoll. Therefore, they need to be part of solving the problem at hand.

We hope Sen. Schauer will get involved in raising the issues brought on by the closing of Cedar Knoll.

We appreciate the interest from the companies who want to build a new facility here, but there needs to be some provision made for Medicaid patients.

-- Jackson Citizen Patriot

Friday: The Czarnecki years

[Return to regular web page](#)



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

May 31, 2007

Laura Berman

Angst-filled teen turns into activist

Proposed Medicaid cuts inspires Livonia student to take fight to Michigan Legislature.



On a placid street in Livonia, inside a tidy ranch house bedecked with American flags and flowers, Ryan Stevenson, 16, is working on personal transformation from bookish teen to social activist.

On Tuesday, Ryan was wrapping up a two-week frenzy that began with outrage, continued into documentary video-making and climaxed with a personal visit to the offices of every state senator.

For Ryan the tipping point came two weeks ago: He listened to a public radio report that described the way Medicaid cuts would hurt the poor. And, while listening, Ryan snapped.

For a year or more, he'd been stuck in the quicksand of adolescent angst -- reading about the Surrealist movement in the 1920s, listening to Jim Morrison and the Doors, filling his bookshelves with poetry and philosophy.

He read, he thought, he moped.

And then he decided to act -- to spur on the adults in power who were, in his opinion, failing to work to their potential.

Ryan Stevenson is not a wild-eyed radical; he's a polite, fresh-faced teen who wears glasses and speaks diplomatically. He describes his parents as "pretty conservative."

"I've never done anything political, or remotely like this, before," Ryan says. This was on Tuesday, as he and friend Kate Lang readied for a trip to Lansing on behalf of their ad hoc group. For want of a better name, they're calling it the Youth Action Network.

'World could be better'

"We believe things in this world could be better so much more could be done," he wrote in a letter hand-delivered to state senators, along with a copy of the 35-minute DVD they produced.

Somewhere along the way, Ryan realized that his passion -- what he really cares about -- is the plight of people who are overlooked or helpless. Last week, Ryan and Kate, 15, who both attend Livonia's Churchill High School, conducted interviews with leaders of two social service agencies. In the end, Ryan wound up taking the microphone at a Lansing meeting to protest the proposed cuts.

He also met with a constituent service representative for House Speaker Andy Dillon. Dillon later issued a statement lauding Ryan for "his dedication to the most vulnerable people in the state."

Making a difference

In the spirit of 21st century politics, Ryan launched a publicity campaign, e-mailing TV stations, radio stations and newspapers, hoping to create interest in the story of socially conscious teens in Livonia.

"He's a very impressive young man, very earnest working," said Susan Cancro, executive director of Advent House Ministries in Lansing.

Since Ryan's trip to Lansing two days ago, legislators have officially pushed back the Medicaid cut deadline a week -- and unofficially agreed not to make those planned deep cuts.

I don't know whether Ryan Stevenson and Kate Lang can take credit for these reversals -- but I hope they walk away with a sense that even high school kids with a microphone, a computer and a passion for change can, maybe, make a dent in the system.

You can reach Laura Berman at (248) 647-7221 or lborman@detnews.com.

[Return to regular web page](#)



National health care needed

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

ATLAS TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, May 31, 2007

Journal Reader

The argument about which medical insurance plan teachers should have is bogus ["A whole MESSA trouble," May 20, Page A1]. General Motors claims it cannot afford coverage for its employees, so how can underfunded school districts afford to buy the excellent coverage teachers deserve?

It's time for national health care. A national single-payer system would eliminate the huge medical costs related to paperwork and insurance company overhead, and the savings could be used to cover everyone in the country. No one would be forced into bankruptcy by medical costs, and the entire population would be healthier.

The U.S. spends more on medical care than any other country, and we have millions uninsured and underinsured. Our current system is a failure. People should call their congressperson and demand national health care. The health they save may be their own.

Susan Balog

Atlas Township

©2007 Flint Journal

© 2007 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

Posted: 5-31-2007

Unemployment rates slightly higher than last year

KEVIN BRACISZESKI – LUDINGTON DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Mason County's estimated 8 percent unemployment rate for April is slightly higher than last year's 7.7-percent rate, with 35 more county residents looking for work than there were a year ago.

The April rates for Manistee County (9.2 percent) and Lake County (11.2 percent) were both lower than in March and higher than they were a year ago. Oceana County's 9.2-percent rate is lower than its March rate and also slightly lower than the April 2006 rate.

Figures from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth also show the number of working Mason County residents fell by 226 during the past year — for a total reduction in the labor force of 191 workers, who may have moved out of the area with their families.

The estimates show a definite improvement over March numbers. At that time the state guessed the unemployment rate was 9.7 percent, with 214 more jobless people than a month later.

This year's April rate ranked Mason County with the 35th highest unemployment among Michigan's 83 counties. Michigan's April rate went up in April, estimated at 7.1 percent, which — opposite of the local trend — is higher than the March estimate of 6.5 percent and the April 2006 rate of 6.8 percent.

State estimates also show:

- Manistee County — April's rate was 9.2 percent and is lower than the 10-percent March rate and higher than the April 2006 rate of 8.5 percent. The April 2007 rate ranked the county in a tie for 57th place among Michigan's 83 counties.

- Oceana County — April's rate was 9.2 percent and is lower than the 10.3-percent March rate and higher than the April 2006 rate of 9.3 percent. The April 2007 rate ranked the county in a tie for 57th place among Michigan's 83 counties.
 - Lake County — April's rate was 11.2 percent and is lower than the 12-percent March rate and lower than the April 2006 rate of 10.2 percent. The April 2007 rate ranked the county in 76th place among Michigan's 83 counties.
-



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published May 31, 2007

House OKs balanced budget measures

But votes by lawmakers seen as short-term fix by Wall Street

Chris Andrews
Lansing State Journal

State lawmakers moved closer to balancing this year's state budget Wednesday, but Wall Street appears less than impressed with short-term fixes.

And state workers aren't very happy either.

"It's a Band-Aid. They are delaying it until next year and the future, they are undermining their whole premise of what they should be standing up for," said Laura Colville, a Department of Human Services worker from DeWitt. "It's just very stressful both as a taxpayer and as an employee."

The state House passed a couple of key measures to balance the fiscal 2007 budget with one-time solutions.

Lawmakers voted to sell a portion of the state's future payouts from a tobacco lawsuit settlement and to take between \$90 million and \$100 million in surplus money from a college loan fund.

Notably missing has been an agreement to either raise taxes or cut major state programs.

The short-term approach contributed to the decision by Standard & Poor's to downgrade Michigan's credit rating. Lower credit ratings mean higher costs in borrowing.

Only two states - California and Louisiana - have ratings lower than Michigan's A+. Michigan's is not expected to go any lower soon.

"We've said all along that the real question is going to be whether or not they can structurally balance things by the end of fiscal '08," said Standard & Poor's credit analyst James Wiemken. "The danger is that by deferring more and more of the problem into fiscal '08, you make that structural imbalance larger, which makes it more difficult to deal with."

Gov. Jennifer Granholm is pushing for a tax increase to help return the state to sound financial footing. Republicans haven't closed the door, but they haven't embraced it either.

Al Hirt, a retiree from Charlotte, said state officials have just shoved this year's problems into 2008.

At a glance

- The state House voted 80-26 approving a measure that could eliminate roughly half of this fiscal year's \$800 million deficit by selling a chunk of the state's future tobacco lawsuit settlement.
- The House also passed a measure by a 101-5 vote that could make available up to \$100 million from a fund intended for college loans. The money is surplus, House officials said, which means it could be used for other purposes without taking money away from existing or planned tuition grants or student loans.

What's next

- Both of those budget-related measures go to the Senate for action as early as next week.

But he doesn't think raising taxes is the right way to go.

"I'm on a fixed income, so how do I come up with extra money? I can't, and they shouldn't either," said Hirt, 71, who works two part-time jobs. "They should just live within their means."

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or candrews@lsj.com.

Copyright 2007 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service (updated August 2006)

[\[Back\]](#)



Nearly a deal on business tax

Democrat charges sabotage; Republican rejects that

May 31, 2007

BY CHRIS CHRISTOFF

FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU CHIEF

LANSING -- Five hours of negotiations Wednesday by lawmakers to draft a new Michigan business tax broke off with one Democratic leader accusing Senate Republicans of sabotaging a potential deal.

Rep. Paul Condino, D-Southfield, said a deal was within grasp when Senate Republicans backtracked on agreements after meeting privately with Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester. Condino is a member of a bipartisan group negotiating a new business tax.

Condino said Bishop did not want a final deal in time for the Detroit Regional Chamber's Mackinac Policy Conference, which began Wednesday and attracts some of the state's leading business executives.

Some speculated the conference could be used as political theater by Gov. Jennifer Granholm and legislative leaders to sign a business tax deal.

"We made a lot of progress. The Senate didn't want to sit at the table," said Condino, majority vice chairman of the House Tax Policy Committee. "My feeling is Sen. Bishop did not want to cut a deal before going to Mackinac.

"Had we stayed at the table we might have reached an agreement. It was bad faith dealing by Mike Bishop who wanted to put his own ego on the line at Mackinac rather than do what businesses want him to do, which is put together a business tax plan."

Bishop's spokesman, Matt Marsden, fired back that Condino was out of line, and that Senate Republicans want to write a complex tax plan that is good public policy, rather than rushing to an artificial deadline.

"These negotiations will take time to create a policy that will move Michigan forward into the 21st Century, and stimulate the economy and create jobs," Marsden said. "These things don't happen overnight. Mr. Condino's comments don't contribute to the process."

Condino said the work group whittled three major disagreements down to one before talks collapsed.

House Democrats and Senate Republicans have offered competing business tax plans. At the start of talks Wednesday, Granholm said the two sides were close, though she did not expect final votes to occur until next week.

The new tax would replace the Single Business Tax, which expires at the end of 2007 by edict of a Republican-led Legislature.

House OKs two bills

Also Wednesday, a key piece of Michigan's budget puzzle cleared the state House. The chamber approved two measures to dip into large funds to plug more than half of an \$800-million deficit this fiscal year. Both are expected to be passed in the Senate next week.

One bill would allow the state to sell up to \$400 million in bonds, and pay back the money using annual payments to the state from five tobacco companies. The companies agreed in 1998 to pay the state about \$300 million a year under a legal settlement.

Of the bond sale money, \$204 million would go to public schools, and thus head off a reduction in state school aid in June.

A second bill would allow the state to shift money from a student loan program to balance the general fund budget. That money, about \$90 million, is considered surplus and would not affect future student loans.

Critics of the plan to use tobacco money to balance the budget say it only delays difficult decisions to raise taxes or make painful budget cuts. Securitizing the tobacco money means the state will receive a lump sum that's worth less than what it will pay back to bond holders.

"It's the only choice they've got if they're not willing to take on tough issues," said Bill Rustem, president of Public Sector Consultants in Lansing. "It's a bad idea because it takes away revenues from the future. It kicks the can down the road."

Then there's next year...

Granholtz and House Democratic leaders are calling for a large tax increase to avoid an estimated \$1.6-billion deficit in the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

That deficit could grow if the state's economy continues its downward spiral.

House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford Township, acknowledged that using the tobacco and student loan funds is a temporary fix. He said the agreement will avoid layoffs of state employees, and cutting money to schools and Medicaid recipients.

"You'll see us moving quickly in the next couple weeks to avoid this kind of thing in the future," Dillon said.

He added, "This is 20 years of problems we're trying to deal with in 5 months. That's difficult to do."

Contact **CHRIS CHRISTOFF** at 517-372-8660 or christoff@freepress.com.

Copyright © 2007 Detroit Free Press Inc.

Employee Concessions 'Still On The Table'

MIRS, May 30, 2007

Despite having an agreement to balance the Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget, an effort to allegedly save the state between \$15 and \$20 million in state employee concessions is "still on the table" and may come in the form of a four-day unpaid break around the Fourth of July.

Sources confirm that Senate Republicans and House Democrats kept the issue of employee concessions alive as a way to later justify, politically, to Michigan taxpayers that a likely large tax increase is needed.

Such a cost-saving maneuver wouldn't be necessary to balance a FY '07 budget that's \$803 million in debt. Evidence of employee concession is nowhere to be found in the budget-balancing bill **SB 0436**, which fills \$139.7 million of the hole. It's not found in the two bills the House passed today that uses a combined \$500 million in one-time fixes. The final \$167 million from the "deal" is coming from seven restricted funds.

However, state Budget Director Bob **EMERSON** allegedly has become the point person to find up to \$20 million at the expense of state employees. This comes at the urging of legislative leadership, particularly Republicans, who weren't happy about the three separate 2 percent raises negotiated with employee unions by the Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** administration.

This evolving situation explains why administration officials are referring to the budget-balancing deal as "progress", as opposed to a done deal. Emerson allegedly is looking at four unpaid days around July 4th, but also may be trying to find ways to spread out the savings in 2008.

Whether the savings will happen is yet to be seen, but the alarms within state government have been sounded as the House and Senate look for political cover to support voting for a tax increase.

Michigan State Employees Association (MSEA) President Roberto **MOSQUEDA** said he met with administration officials today and "nobody knows what's going on." He said state employees gave \$300 million in concessions less than two years ago while state lawmakers benefited from the 38 percent raise they gave themselves in 2001."

For lawmakers to look at state employees for any future cuts is not fair to the hard-working men and women who have already given back to the state in times of financial stress.

"We've given. We've given and we've given," Mosqueda said. "We are professionals and we have families living paycheck to paycheck. It's unfair that we become the scapegoats. We keep the infrastructure of this state running, plain and simple."

Asked if he would be willing to renegotiate their 2 percent raise for the coming fiscal year in 2008, Mosqueda's answer was simple:

"No. We deserve that money. We deserve everything we're going to get," he said.

From a practical standpoint, there's still some question as to how the state can require four-day unpaid layoffs without the state employees using their banked leave time to keep from getting paid.

"Just because they did it early and first doesn't mean we should do it often," noted Nick **CIARAMITARO** of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees about the prospect of more concessions to state employees.

Today, reporters asked House Speaker Andy **DILLON** (D-Redford Twp.) if he believes the agreements on the 2007 budget would "stand up."

He said, yes, he does.

MIRS followed up by asking, in light of the fact that the administration describes Friday's agreement as "progress" but never "a deal," if there is actually a 2007 budget deal.

"I think they're just trying to be careful - considering that we're all under the negotiations blackout," Dillon said, adding that if participants are too descriptive of what has been agreed to or put on the table, they could go "too far down that path" to breaking the blackout agreement.

Dillon also said that he is confident that the Legislature will be "aggressively" tackling the state's overall structural deficit.

Michigan Chronicle Online - <http://www.michronicleonline.com/articlelive>

Michigan Women's Foundation celebrates Women of Achievement and Courage

<http://www.michronicleonline.com/articlelive/articles/1171/1/Michigan-Womens-Foundation-celebrates-Women-of-Achievement-and-Courage/Page1.html>

By CHRONICLE STAFF REPORTS

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORTS

Published on 05/30/2007

The Michigan Women's Foundation (MWF) held its 18th Annual Women of Achievement and Courage Celebration at the General Motors Wintergarden in the Renaissance Center.

The Michigan Women's Foundation (MWF)

The Michigan Women's Foundation (MWF) held its 18th Annual Women of Achievement and Courage Celebration at the General Motors Wintergarden in the Renaissance Center. Five of the state's outstanding women were recognized at the ceremony, emceed by WXYZ/Channel 7's Diana Lewis and Glenda Lewis.

The awardees were Anna Diggs Taylor, United States District Court judge; Gail Perry-Mason, best selling author and first vice president of Investments at Oppenheimer & Co., Inc.; Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services; and Birgit M. Klohs, president of the Right Place, Inc., a nonprofit organization that powers economic development in the Greater Grand Rapids area.

The foundation's prestigious Trillium Award for Lifetime Achievement was presented to Beth Goebel, co-founder of the Permanence Project and the Donor's Forum of Grand Rapids. As the only statewide organization focused solely on women and girls, the Foundation also hosts a similar celebration for the honorees in Grand Rapids.

LISA MARIE, Metro Chick Radio; Eleanor Josaitis, past honoree; and Lesley Delgado, Silent Auction co-chair.

WXYZ/CHANNEL 7'S Glenda Lewis and Diana Lewis officiated over the 2007 Women of Achievement and Courage awards ceremony.

GREGORY EATON and Richard Whitmer enjoyed conversation during the Women of Achievement and Courage reception.

DEBORAH DINGELL, General Motors Foundation and Juanita Moore, Celebration Committee.

CO-CHAIRS Jill Jordan and Karen Love .

SAM LOGAN and former MWF honoree Eleanor Josaitis

DIANE BOSTIC ROBINSON (right), dinner committee; Betty Anderson, silent auction co-chair; and Delores Clark Givens, Board of Trustees.

ARETHA MARSHALL, Wendy Stock and honoree Marjorie Beth Goebel look over silent auction items. – Oxygen Photography

DEBORAH COPELAND, Michigan Women's Foundation; Barbara A. Hill, MWF president/CEO; and Judge Anna Diggs Taylor, honoree.

MEMBERS OF the Michigan Women's Foundation's girls-as-grantmakers program, Young Women for Change, with Board chair Linda Forte (third from left). Pictured (from left) are Arielle Johnson Julianne Potter, Alexis Milling, Devin Youn and Chloe Gurin-Sands.

THE MICHIGAN WOMEN'S FOUNDATION 2007 Women of Achievement and Courage: Marianne Udow (left) Marjorie Beth Goebel, Anna Diggs Taylor, Gail Perry-Mason and Birgit M. Klohs.

THE 2007 SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE (standing) surround WXYZ/Channel 7's Glenda Lewis (seated, left), Diana Lewis and Michigan Women's Foundation President/CEO Barbara A. Hill.